

Regional Conservation Partnership Program

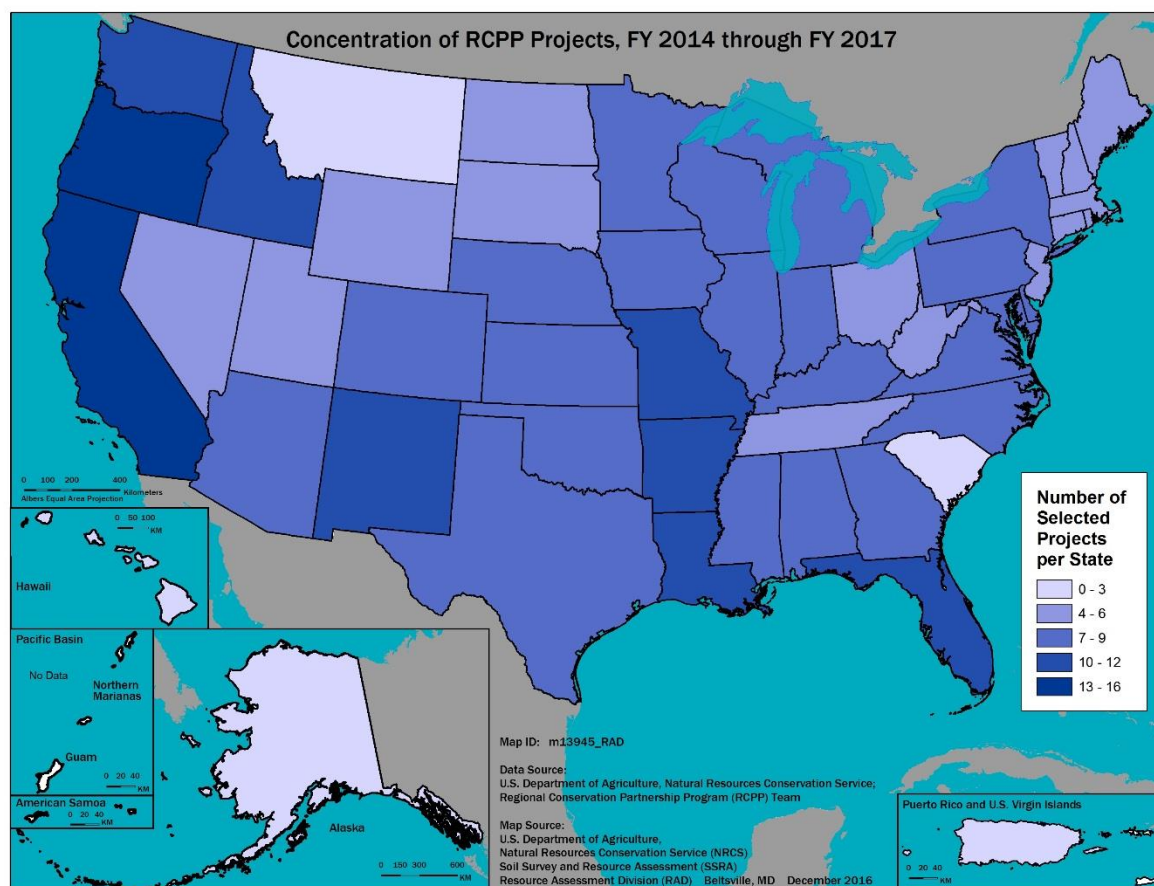
Investing in Virginia



Regional Conservation Partnership Program

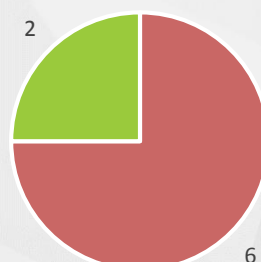
Created by the 2014 Farm Bill, the Regional Conservation Partnership Program (RCPP) is a partner-driven, locally-led approach to conservation. It offers new opportunities for USDA's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) to harness innovation, welcome new partners to the conservation mission, and demonstrates the value and efficacy of voluntary, private lands conservation.

In 2017, NRCS is investing up to \$225 million in 88 projects that impact every state in the nation, including two in Virginia. Since 2014, NRCS has invested more than \$825 million in 286 high-impact projects, bringing together more than 2,000 conservation partners who have invested an additional \$1.4 billion. By 2018, NRCS and partners will have invested at least \$2.4 billion. These projects are leading to cleaner and more abundant water, better soil and air quality, enhance wildlife habitat, more resilient and productive agricultural lands and stronger rural economies.



Virginia Projects to Date

Projects by Resource Concern



8
Projects

\$29.6
million
NRCS Investment

113
Partners

Existing RCPP Projects

Year	Title	Funding Pool	Lead Partner	Number of Partners	NRCS Investment
2016	Blue Ridge PRISM Landowner Programs Expansion	State	Shenandoah National Park Trust	11	\$894,000
2016	Upper Clinch-Powell Watershed Partnership	National	The Nature Conservancy – Clinch Valley Program	16	\$4.5 million
2014/2015	Accelerating Chesapeake Bay Watershed Implementation Plans	CCA	Maryland Department of Agriculture	12	\$5.5 million
2014/2015	Comprehensive Watershed Conservation in Dairy and Livestock Landscapes of the Chesapeake Bay	CCA	National Fish and Wildlife Foundation	20	\$7 million
2014/2015	Delmarva Whole System Conservation Partnership - From Field to Stream	CCA	The Nature Conservancy	35	\$5 million
2014/2015	Forests-Fundamental for Conservation in Virginia	State	Virginia Department of Forestry	1	\$1.3 million

2017 RCPP Projects

Engaging Small Producers in the Nutrient Management Planning Process

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$4,575,000 (Critical Conservation Area - Chesapeake Bay Watershed)

Lead Partner: Sustainable Chesapeake

Number of Initial Partners: 16

Participating States: Virginia (Lead State)

Partners will engage up to 100 Maryland and Virginia small dairy producers in the development and implementation of comprehensive nutrient management plans. This effort will support producer and state efforts to meet Chesapeake Bay and local pollution reduction goals.



Oyster Bottom Restoration through Aquaculture

Proposed NRCS Investment: \$852,000 (State)

Lead Partner: Virginia Marine Resources Commission

Number of Initial Partners: 2

Participating States: Virginia (Lead State)

Wild oyster populations have declined dramatically over the past sixty years due to habitat degradation from human population growth within the Chesapeake Bay watershed, sedimentation from land-based activities, and from harvesting. Historically, oyster producers added shells to their privately leased oyster ground in order to catch wild oysters. As oyster diseases became more entrenched in Chesapeake Bay investment and oyster farming on these leases declined, leaving them fallow and leading to further habitat degradation. Modern aquaculture is hatchery-based and provides producers improved genetic stocks of oysters which grow faster and survive disease. Over the past decade, these selected stocks of native oysters have performed well and have resulted in the investment in oyster hatcheries and nurseries by private firms which provide seed oysters and larvae to a rapidly growing, modern oyster aquaculture industry. Virginia's oyster harvest from private leases has increased from less than 20,000 bushels in 2005 to over 356,000 bushels in 2015. This project will restore the degraded oyster habitat in Virginia's tidal tributaries of Chesapeake Bay by implementing a cost-share partnership between NRCS, Virginia Marine Resources Commission, Virginia Institute of Marine Science and Virginia oyster producers. The program would provide oyster shell substrate needed to rebuild a suitable habitat for oyster survival and growth on privately leased oyster bottom. In return, the producer would privately invest in planting the restored area with an adequate volume of spat-on-shell oysters. These oysters will address two priority natural resource concerns by improving water quality by removing excess nitrogen through filtration (feeding), and providing a needed habitat for a variety of fish, juvenile crabs and other wildlife. Increasing the amount of oysters planted on restored bottom would also help local governments meet the nutrient goals established in the Chesapeake Bay Total Maximum Daily Load.